

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2007AG0002-000135
Feb. 15, 2007

Ministry of Attorney General

BRITISH COLUMBIA CELEBRATES CULTURAL DIVERSITY

VICTORIA – British Columbians are benefiting from an increasingly culturally diverse society as more and more immigrants make this province their destination, said Attorney General and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism Wally Oppal.

With Feb. 11 through 17 marking the 21st Multiculturalism Week in British Columbia, the provincial government and communities around the province recognize and celebrate the contributions of ethnic and cultural diversity to B.C.'s society.

"In these times of changing demographics in our province, country and globally, Multiculturalism Week is a time to renew our commitments to create safe, secure and economically vibrant communities for newcomers and to break down barriers to equal opportunities for immigrants," Oppal said. "British Columbia has a strong foundation of respect for cultural diversity and we must step up our efforts to be inclusive."

"Promoting multiculturalism is a shared responsibility between the public, private and community sectors," said Dave Hayer, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism. "Diversity of cultures is one of the qualities that make B.C. the best place on Earth."

The province continues to be a popular destination in Canada for newcomers. B.C. is respected nationally and internationally as a leader for its progressive multiculturalism values and beliefs. Government policies are intended to encourage the full and free participation of all individuals in B.C. society.

The provincial Multicultural Advisory Council (MAC) is advising the attorney general on strategies to ensure B.C. hosts the most inclusive and culturally diverse Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games ever held. The MAC 2010 multiculturalism working group will collaborate with the ethnic community to refine B.C.'s 2010 multiculturalism theme vision and guiding principles.

The Province is further creating welcoming communities for newcomers through programs that enhance community understanding of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. B.C. received over \$1 million in new federal funding this November to support Canada's Action Plan Against Racism and the BC Anti-Racism and Multiculturalism Program (BCAMP). The ministry is consulting with community agencies and government to develop spending plans for the new funding.

B.C. currently provides \$500,000 provincewide annually through BCAMP to support activities that prevent and eliminate racism. Examples are projects that increase public awareness of cross-cultural understanding, reducing racist and discriminatory views, behaviours and practices. BCAMP also supports efforts by individuals, organizations and governments to combat racism and build safer communities.

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During 2006, British Columbia further negotiated \$71.5 million in new federal funding for settlement programs over the next two years. The funding, provided under the Agreement for Canada-British Columbia Co-operation on Immigration, will help newcomers to better adapt to B.C. through new, enhanced and expanded settlement and immigration services.

Programs such as the British Columbia Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) and Skills Connect for Immigrants attract skilled immigrants by helping them to obtain residency more quickly. Since 2001, over 2,500 skilled and business immigrants, and their dependents, have made this province their home through the B.C. PNP. Skills Connect for Immigrants helps reduce labour shortages by helping skilled immigrants to find suitable jobs.

Part of government's commitment to creating harmonious and welcoming communities, these settlement and immigration services promote opportunities for immigrants, while fostering respect and understanding for newcomers.

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